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ABSTRACT

Recent criticism of public education has led to demands for educational improvement. Responses to this criticism include the development of minimum competency tests (MCTs) and calls for increased academic requirements. This paper reviews a national survey of state graduation requirements that reveals a wide variance in requirements. Eighteen states reported they are considering changes in graduation requirements, while 21 states are now requiring MCTs for graduation. Reviews of pertinent litigation revealed that courts have sustained the right of boards of education to require MCTs for graduation. Guidelines to be followed in safeguarding student rights include: (1) providing adequate notice, (2) avoiding cultural bias, (3) having curricular and instructional validity, and (4) avoiding arbitrary cutoff levels. Boards of education should establish performance standards only after thorough study of the school community and then stand behind the administrators and teachers as they implement the policy. (MD)

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STANDARDS TO DEMAND FOR PROMOTION AND GRADUATION

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A Paper

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by

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STANDARDS TO DEMAND FOR PROMOTION AND GRADUATION

Abstract

Public education has undergone a bombardment of criticism from the public and the press. This criticism has led to a number of national studies and a demand that the products of our public schools show improvement.

Minimum competency tests (MCT) came to the front as one means to insure that graduates of the public schools do in fact possess certain levels of educational achievements. A call for increased academic activities demanded an increase in the number of credits required for graduation.

A survey of the states revealed a wide variance in the number of credits required for graduation. Four states had no requirements; one state required only a one-semester course in government; and one state required only one year of study in history/government. One state required 16 units, but did not specify the units. Most states required credit in the areas of English, mathematics, and science. The modes for these subject areas were as follows: English, 25 states required more than three units; mathematics, 23 states required one unit; and science, 27 states required one unit. Eighteen states reported that changes in graduation requirements were under consideration. Twenty-one states indicated that minimum competency tests were required for graduation. Many respondents indicated that local boards of education imposed the minimum competency test requirement without state mandate.

A review of pertinent litigation revealed that the courts have sustained the right of boards of education to require a MCT as a condition for receiving a diploma. Certain guidelines were suggested as a means to safeguard the constitutional rights of students.

In summary, citizens, parents and students themselves appear acceptable to a strengthening of academic processes. The role of the board of education is crucial. School boards must establish realistic standards for promotion and graduation and then then support the superintendents, principals and teachers in reaching these goals. History seems to have taught us that if we expect less from students, we get less. BUT, if we expect more--we will get more.

STANDARDS TO DEMAND FOR PROMOTION AND GRADUATION

Why is a topic of this title appropriate for a gathering of educators such as this? The issue of appropriate education has been debated since the days of Plato and Aristotle, and certainly the issue has been a matter of concern throughout the history of our United States. The dynamic nature of society causes shifts in major emphasis from time to time with regard to what that society demands from its schools. Let us take a cursory look at some of the current literature on the subject.

A Look at Some Current Literature

For a history of graduation requirements, one could look to Shaw and Walker.[1] These authors point out that the "Carnegie Unit" has dominated our thinking in establishing graduation requirements for more than 70 years. The influence of college admission requirements has been very influential in determining high school graduation standards over the years, and this is still the case. A recent newspaper account reflects the demands university admission standards exert on courses taken by high school students.[2] The University of Utah announced that beginning in 1987, the entrance requirements would demand certain prerequisites from high school graduates. University officials reported a "dramatic increase" this year in Utah high school enrollments in the prerequisite courses.[3]

Three of the nation's leading weekly periodicals have reported the problems of the public schools. The cover of Newsweek of April 20, 1981, carried the label of "Why Public Schools Are Failing." In this issue, one article was entitled "The Bright Flight" and described one public school dilemma as follows: "Private schools are booming--drawing the brightest pupils from public schools beset with problems."[4] In 1982, Time magazine reported as follows:

> Many of America's schools today teach precious little of what students ought to know, and that little ill. High school diplomas are routinely awarded to students who are functionally illiterate, who cannot do long division, and who have no idea what is contained in the Bill of Rights.[5]

More to the point of this discussion, U.S. News and World Report reported:

> Public schools in more than two-thirds of the states have imposed a minimum competency requirement for promotion or graduation--only one of several measures being pushed to meet public concern about long declining academic standards.[6]

The same issue carred an article describing the manner in which standards were stiffened in the Rockville, Maryland high school.[7]

The increase in private school enrollment and the concomitant decline in public school enrollment have been the concerns of many authors. Nordin and Turner point out that one of the motives for enrollment in the fundamentalist schools is the desire to return to values of the past.[8]

The public versus private school debate raises many issues, one of which is the achievement of students in these schools. When asked the question about private schools providing better education than public schools, Secretary of Education Bell stated he thought private school did a better job, and added he would "be surprised if they didn't."[9] Secretary Bell explained that the private schools operate under different rules than public schools, with much more discretion as to which pupils they accept and keep. James Coleman's report of 1981 points out that private schools produce higher achievement in their pupils,

> not because they are private, but because they "create higher rates of engagement in academic activities. . . school attendance is better, students do more homework and students generally take more rigorous subjects."[10]

The American School Board Journal, the official publication of this organization, offered a number of articles rebutting the charges made against public schools.[11] Bill Anderson sounded the theme of these articles with his title: "Public Schools are under fire, but we have just begun to fight."[12]

One of the criticisms leveled at public schools has been the phenomenon of social promotion. The pros and cons of this issue has run rampant for decades. Thompson gives some evidence that the schools have started to eliminate social promotion. Examples of how several schools tackled the problem are presented and the cost of testing programs was discussed.[13] Ebel maintains schools without failure have failed and urges educators to accept the hard task of identifying and reporting failure to learn. He states, "When failure to learn cannot be prevented or corrected, it should be recognized and accepted."[14]

Criticism of the effectiveness of public education has been leveled by recipients of the education, and the criticism has led to court. In 1976, Peter W. brought action against a San Francisco school district, claiming negligence and intentional misrepresentation which deprived him of basic academic skills. He alleged he was able to read at only the fifth-grade level when he graduated, and this was not adequate to enable him to enter the world of work.[15] Two years later a student brought action against a New York school district to recover $5,000,000 damages for his academic

deficiencies. He claimed he was permitted to graduate although he had failed several subjects and lacked basic reading and writing skills.[16] While these suits were not successful for the plaintiffs, the accusations of poor public school performance were well reported by the media.

Minimum Competency Tests

The concern of the public with achievement of pupils in public schools has caused reaction by boards of education and school officials. One such reaction has been the development and implementation of minimum competency tests (hereafter designated as MCT). The literature is replete with articles on MCT, and one can find in this literature claims by some educators that such tests have been in place for many years.[17] For purposes of our discussion, we will focus on the MCT movement since about 1975. Perhaps the MCT program receiving the most publicity has been that of the State of Florida. The Florida legislature passed the Educational Accountability Act (note accountability in the title) in 1976. This act was amended in 1978 to include passing of a functional literacy test prior to receipt of a state high school diploma. It is well-known history that this requirement resulted in litigation which delayed implementation of the legislation (more on this in a later section).

The MCT movement flourished, with more and more states and local boards of education opting for this strategy. Pipho reported in 1978 that 33 states had taken some type of action mandating MCT and that the remaining states had legislation pending or studies underway on the subject. Chall found approximately the same statistics in a separate study.[19] In April, 1979, Krajewski admonished boards of education. "The minimum competency bandwagon is rolling your way and you'd better get ready for it."[20]

Like most issues in public education, MCT generated a great deal of debate. The debate may best be summarized from the National Institute of Education adversary hearing on MCT conducted in July, 1981. Two adversary teams presented witnesses on behalf of their sides of the argument. The pro team argued that

> minimum competency testing can work well if seven important tenets are observed. First, the desired competencies must be conscientiously identified. Second, there needs to be an appropriate competency test or tests, criterion-referenced rather than nationally normed. Third, a relationship should exist between the educational program and the competency test. Fourth, students should be given multiple opportunities to take the test. Fifth, an adequate phase-in time for the testing program is essential. Sixth, the passing score on the test should be sensibly set. Finally, coordinated staff development is essential, so that the tests can be used to improve the instructional program.[21]

The con team countered by arguing that

> . . . minimum competency testing is flawed by the technological limitations of test construction, by misplaced emphasis on educational minima

> to the neglect of higher-order skills, and by excessive centralization of educational decision-making. A single test score is an inadequate criterion for awarding or withholding diplomas. . .[22]

Leaders of the two teams offer summaries of the relative positions in the debate.[23]

A final example of different opinion on MCT is cited. Pullin, one of the attorneys for plaintiffs in the Florida litigation, declared that "The history of minimum competency testing to date, in Florida and elsewhere, is marred by numerous examples of educational decision-making that is neither in the best interests of students nor of public education.[24] Ralph Turlington, Commissioner of Education for the State of Florida, counters Pullins' declaration by proclaiming, "We believe just the opposite--that the competency testing program is a powerful force to motivate improvement."[25] And so the debate rages on. Let us now turn to what the states are doing.

What the States Are Doing

To prepare for this presentation, the author conducted a study of the states. A questionnaire was sent to the chief state school officer in each state to determine the answer to the following questions:

> What are the requirements for high school graduation?
> Are changes in these requirements contemplated?
> Is passing a MCT a requirement for promotion or graduation?

Responses were received from all of the 50 states as well as from the District of Columbia. The major findings of this study are reported below.

High School Graduation Requirements

Wide variances in state-mandated requirements for graduation were reported. Four states had no state-mandated requirements at all.[26] These states leave the matter to local school boards. Vermont requires 16 units, but does not specify the units. Michigan's only state-wide requirement is a one-semester course in government, while Wyoming's only state-wide requirement is one year of study in history/government plus an examination on state and U.S. constitutions.

The areas of English, mathematics, and science are the most frequent requirements for high school graduation. The diagram below givens a general picture of what states are requiring in these areas:

English		Mathematics		Science	
Units	# of States Requiring	Units	# of States Requiring	Units	# of States Requiring
2 or less	2	1	23	1	27
3	14	1½ or 2	12	2	9
more than 3	25	3 or more	1	3 or more	0

Changes in State Requirements

Results from the study indicate that changes in high school graduation requirements are being considered in 18 of the states. In nearly all cases, mathematics and science requirements would be increased, and in most cases an increase in the English requirement is contemplated.

The process of increasing state requirements for high school graduation is often arduous and painful. My own state of Indiana is currently struggling through this problem. For some 30 years the graduation requirements have been 32 credits total, with required 6 credits in English, 4 credits in social studies, 2 credits in Mathematics, 2 credits in science, and 1 credit each of physical education and health/safety. For some two years the General Commission on Education, State Board of Education, has studied the issue and proposed to increase the total required credit from 32 to 38. Included in the proposal was an additional year of study in English, mathematics, and science, an additional half year of study in social studies and physical education, and a new requirement of one-half year of study in computer science.

The procedure in Indiana to alter administrative rules and regulations calls for public hearings. The Commission on General Education held four hearings throughout the state and, as a result, dropped the additional requirement in physical education and computer science. Added to the proposed change in graduation requirements was one year of study in fine or practical arts. Much testimony, pro and con, was heard from parents, citizens and professional organization spokespersons. The gamet of testimony ranged from strong support, to concerns about added costs, to lamenting the neglect of certain special interest areas.

To illustrate the nature of concern from one corner, the quote below sets out the position of the Indiana Association of Public School Superintendents:

> . . . we are requesting that the Commission on General Education defer immediate action on the proposed changes in graduation requirements. . . . If a program is not achieving its intended goals, requiring more of the same program does not improve the results. Higher quantity requirements do not assure higher quality outcomes. The IAPSS supports the emphasis on the improvement of the quality of programs rather than the quantity of programs.[27]

This is an example of the struggle to interpret what the public wants and demands for and from its schools. No doubt other states can give similar testimony.

Requirements of Minimum Competency Tests

The responses to inquiry on this subject indicated that some 21 states have legislation or State Board of Education regulations for such a requirement. Many responses pointed out that local boards of education had the

authority to require such tests for high school graduation. The scope of the investigation did not include a survey of local school corporations; however, there is little doubt that many local school corporations have such a requirement. This study would indicate a general congruence with what the literature reports on the number of states and schools requiring the MCT.

Some Legal Concerns

Reference was made earlier to litigation resulting from the implementation of Florida's Educational Accountability Act of 1976. A class action was instituted against Turlington et al. alleging the testing program violated the Fourteenth Amendment on three counts as follows: (1) the test was culturally biased, (2) implementation of the program denied diplomas without sufficient notice or time to prepare for the exam, and (3) the testing program was a device for resegregating Florida's public schools since those failing the test were placed in rememdial classes which tended to contain more blacks than whites.

The case finally was decided by the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals.[28] That court reasoned that the state of Florida had the right to condition the receipt of a diploma upon the passing of an examination so long as the test is a fair test of that which is taught. Additionally, the Court affirmed the lower court's decision that the test did have construct validity in that it did test functional literacy as defined by the Board (State Board of Education) and that the functional literacy test examination bears a rational relation to a valid state interest[29]

The court held, however, that the test violated the constitutional rights of plaintiffs for at least three reasons: (1) the diploma sanction was implemented on too short a notice; (2) the diploma sanction punished black students for deficiencies created by the dual school system; and (3) the test may have covered matters not taught in the schools of the state. The court stated:

> We hold. . . that the State may not deprive its high school seniors of the economic and educational benefits of a high school diploma until it has demonstrated that the SSAT II is a fair test of that which is taught in its classrooms and that racially discriminatory impact is not due to the educational deprivation in the "dual school" years.[30]

Thus the court remanded the case to the lower court to determine whether or not the test was examining what was being taught in the classrooms. Once the curricular validity is established, the court assumed it would be called on to look into the role and effect of "vestiges" of past discrimination upon black students resulting from the dual school system.

Two other court cases challenged certain aspects of the Florida testing law. John Brady complained that the rules were written in such a way as to operate in retrospect. That is, scores on the test taken before the

rule was adopted were to be considered in determining students' eligibility for a diploma. The Court of Appeals held that the rule was valid with regards to due process objectives.[31] Brady also charged that scoring criteria were invalid because the Commissioner of Education adopted such criteria in violation of state statute. The court ruled in favor of the Commissioner.[32]

Georgia is another state that experienced some court action over MCT. Seniors in that state asked a local school board to drop a policy requiring graduating seniors to pass a math and reading skills test at a level required of incoming freshmen. The board denied the request. The students appealed to the State Board of Education, and the request was again denied. The students then filed suit to enjoin the school district from imposing the minimum competency test as a prerequisite for graduation. The Georgia Court of Appeals upheld the school district's right to promulgate policy reasonably related to the state's interest in educating youth.[33]

Anderson v. Banks[34] presents an interesting study with respect to exit examinations as a requirement for graduation. The Tattnall County School District adopted a policy stating that beginning with the graduating class of 1978, all graduates must achieve a grade equivalency score of 9.0 on mathematics and reading sections of the California Achievement Test (CAT). This was in addition to already existing requirements for graduation.

The issue in this case was traced back to the abolishment of the dual educational system of the county. A tracking system was introduced which was supposedly based on achievement. However, the expert witness for the plaintiff testified that the distinction between achievement grouping and ability grouping is an illusory one since it is impossible to measure raw ability.[35] After analyzing the data submitted by expert witnesses, the court determined that the black students had not been placed fairly. The court further stated that there was no basis . . . "for concluding that achievement grouping as practiced in Tattnall County has obvious benefits."[36]

The characteristics of the CAT were studied and the court determined that the test itself was an acceptable instrument when used for the purposes for which it was constructed. Plaintiffs objected to the use of CAT in Tattnall County on several bases: failure to use the standard error of measurement in determining a cut-off score; lack of local validation of the tests; bias of the test; the lack of curriculum correspondence; misgrading of the tests; and reliability of the tests. The court took very little stock in these arguments.

Several teachers and administrators testified that the diploma policy was having a desirable effect in the school system. One of the plaintiff's expert witnesses testified that educational progress was being made, and the court concluded that ". . . the policy is producing some educational benefits in Tattnall County."[37]

A portion of the case at bar included the awarding of certificates to EMR students rather than diplomas. The State Board of Education recommended that EMR students be given a diploma, and the Tattnall County School

District has agreed to give diplomas to EMR students who achieve the 9.0 score on the reading and math section of the CAT.

The court ruled that the diploma policy, per se, did not violate the Fourteenth Amendment on the basis of racial discrimination. However, considering the past de jure history of a segregated system, and an unfair tracking system which perpetuated it, the discriminatory impact of the policy did violate the plaintiff's constitutional rights. The diploma policy cannot be constitutionally imposed on those who attended classes in the dual system.

The court ruled that the tracking system used until 1981 could not pass constitutional muster. In effect, certain aspects of the de jure segregation practiced in the dual system were perpetuated by the tracking system. Thus, the court ruled that the diploma sanction must be suspended until 1983. However, the court observed that not all students in Tattnall County were subject to tracking practices and that disparities between black and white pupil achievement are narrowing. Hence, the court ruled that the diploma sanction could be reinstated in 1983, provided the school district could show "that the increased educational opportunities outweigh any lingering causal connection between the discriminatory tracking system and the imposition of the diploma sanction.[38]

Relying heavily on Debra P. v. Turlington, the court declared ". . . that where the award of a diploma depends on the outcome of a test, the burden is on the school authorities to show that the test covered only material actually taught."[39]

The issue of denying properly classified handicapped students a diploma was addressed by the court. Essentially, the court said that it was faced with an argument that an educational institution has no right to define its standards. The court rejected this argument saying ". . . while school authorities are free to award regular diplomas to any student, no matter what level of achievement reached, the Court concludes that Section 504 (Rehabilitation Act of 1973) does not require such action."[40] Classifying students as EMR students when they were not such students constituted a violation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the court ordered corrective action be taken. The court held that the classification was not intentional, nor did the diploma policy create a quasi-suspect class. For these reasons, the court declared that the equal protection rights of the handicapped had not been violated.

Two handicapped students in New York were awarded diplomas after completion of their Individual Educational Programs. The Commissioner of Education issued a letter which informed the students that the diplomas were invalid because recipients had not successfully passed the competency examinations. The examinations required proficiency in reading or English and mathematics. Plaintiffs brought suit claiming the action of the Commissioner's office violated state statutes, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Education for the Handicapped Act of 1974, as well as the equal protection and due process guarantees of the Fourteenth Amendment.[41]

The court ruled that the state has a legitimate interest in attempting to ensure the value of a diploma and the use of competency testing to achieve this interest is within the discretionary powers of the Commissioner. The court was not convinced that denial of diplomas based on failure to meet testing requirement would violate Section 504. The court further reasoned that the award of a diploma was not a necessary part of a "free appropriate education." Thus, the denial of the diploma did not violate the Education of the Handicapped Act.[42]

The court determined that the plaintiffs had property rights in their expectation of the diploma and a liberty right in their freedom to pursue employment opportunities and to be free from the stigmatizing effect of diploma denial. The court did not decide the case on the basis of whether or not the tests used were valid with respect to handicapped children. The case was decided on the basis that plaintiffs did not receive timely notice of the diploma sanction. The court added that "The Court is not compelled nor is it deemed provident at this juncture to set a specific time period which would be adequate."[43] The scope of the decision in indicated by the wording of the order, which states, ". . . the diploma requirement. . . is improper as to the individual petitioners Abby and Richard."[44]

Peoria School District #150 in Illinois developed a Minimum Competency Test (MCT) requiring passing of examinations in "minimal" reading, language arts, and mathematics as a graduation requirement. The requirement was first imposed on the 1980 graduating class. Students are permitted five attempts to pass the tests. Eleven students who had learning disabilities and/or other handicaps failed part of the test one or more times and were awarded Certificates of Program Completion rather than regular diplomas. The State Superintendent of Education ordered the Peoria School Board officials to award the usual diploma because of failure of the board to give adequate and timely notice.

Litigation resulted with the various participants requesting the court to direct certain action.[45] Plaintiffs requested: (1) they receive regular diplomas; (2) appropriate modification of the MCT for handicapped children; (3) Peoria School District #150 be directed to cease using the MCT unless it was appropriately modified for handicapped children; and (4) the State Superintendent be directed to find the MCT invalid. The State Superintendent requested that his Administrative Order be upheld and that the school district be ordered to implement it. School District #150 requested: (1) that the validity of the MCT program be upheld as valid; (2) that two named students be permitted to retake the exam with requested modification; and (3) the order for issuance of diplomas to certain plaintiffs be reversed.

The court ruled the school's minimum competency test requirement for a diploma was reasonable; the test did not have to be modified to take into account lack of mental ability or capacity; and that State Superintendent's order issuing diplomas to eleven students had to be reversed. Several aspects of the decision are interesting. The court rejected plaintiff's claim that the test was scientifically invalid. Noting that no test

of human beings by human beings can always be scientifically exact, the court continued:

> It is a reasonable test of the accomplishments of the school system in imparting basic knowledge to all its students, and unless some such measure is permitted, no certification of graduation from an educational program can have any meaning whatsoever. . .[46]

The court also rejected plaintiff's request to modify the test to accommodate handicapping conditions. The court stated it was unreasonable to believe that,

> . . . one can discover the knowledge or degree of learning of a mentally impaired student by modifying the test to avoid contact with the mental deficiency. To do so would simply be to pretend that the deficiency did not exist, and to fail completely to measure the learning. A diploma issued as a result of passing such a modified test would be a perversion of the program to lend meaning to the diploma as a record of educational achievement.[47]

In dealing with the matter of timely notice, this court decided differently than those in Florida and New York. The court observed that plaintiffs and parents were aware of diploma requirement at least a year in advance. The State Superintendnet also testified that individual plaintiffs may have lacked exposure to as much as 90 percent of the material covered in the MCT. However, the court noted that the reason for such lack of exposure was the nature of individual educational plans for students concerned, which made such exposure inappropriate. Continuing, the court states,

> . . . because of a diagnosed mental condition making it impossible or detrimental for a certain boy to wrestle with basic arithmetic, that subject matter is left out. . . in an effort to give him the benefit of as much of an enriching educational experience as will be worthwhile to him, and not clutter it with subject matter which would be harmful or simply worthless to him.[48]

Under such conditions, it is a fallacy to extend the period of notice, or absent such notice over a period of years, to award the same diploma as that awarded to all persons who are proficient in the subject. The court made a distinction in this case and those where testing conditions make it impossible to disclose the degree of learning that is actually possessed.

Considering the property and liberty interests, the court took note that the federal consitution prohibits violation of due process guarantees regardless of whether the student has any handicapping condition or <u>has no handicapping condition</u> (court's emphasis). The fact that some stigma may be attached to failure to achieve a high school diploma:

> . . . has nothing to do with the legitimacy of a minimum competency test that is reasonably designed to test for a basic level of learning which a school district wishes to make certain it imparts to all those who receive its diploma. The means to avoid such stigma exists in

attainment of the necessary knowledge. If capacity for such does not exist, the law does not require pretense to the contrary.[49]

The 7th Circuit Court of Appeals reversed the lower court and ordered the diplomas awarded, but upheld the right of the school to require the MCT for graduation stating, "The School District's desire to ensure the value of its diploma by requiring graduating students to attain minimal skills is admirable. . ."[50] The main issue decided by the 7th Circuit was timely notice. A specific number of months or years for timely notice was not defined. The court stated that the notice requirement would be satisfied if the School District could meet one of the following conditions: (1) ensure that handicapped students are sufficiently exposed to most of the material that appears on the MCT; or (2) produce evidence that a particular student would be better off concentrating on educational objectives other than preparation for the MCT.[51]

In summary, courts to date have sustained the right of boards of education to require passing a MCT as a condition for receiving a diploma. Jones has pointed out the guidelines for developing such programs which include: (1) providing adequate notice, (2) avoiding cultural bias, (3) having curricular and instructional validity, and (4) avoiding arbitrary cut-off levels of proficiency.[52] Several other authors have written useful articles on the legality of MCT.[53]

One Point of View

So what standards should one demand for promotion and/or graduation? To school board members, I say, demand whatever standards you want. Public citizens, parents, and students themselves appear to be in a frame of mind for a rededication to seriousness in educational performance. Whether this means an increase in the quantity, a strengthening of the quality, or both, is a matter to be determined by the states and local school boards. My sense is that the responsibility of school board members is awesome.

The words of Secretary of Education Terrell Bell are to the point:

> A school board's first objective should be to set high standards of classroom accomplishment and to make those standards widely known. Too often, that is not being done. The second task is to see that the superintendents and principals and teachers strive to reach those goals. When superintendents around the country try to implement higher academic standards, they are frequently undercut by school boards that are afraid to back up tougher policies.
>
> That's why I zero in on the school board. It is the chief policymaking body in a school system. I don't think these boards are doing their duty in the country by setting less-than-rigorous standards. Parents and tax payers have a right to know that students must attain a minimum-competency level, or they will not progress from one grade to the next. If the school boards would set that kind of policy and require it of

of everyone, I think we would solve this very complex problem.[54]

Dr. David P. Gardner, President of the University of Utah, is Chairman of President Reagan's National Commission on Excellence in Education. Among the problems the Commission is studying are the expectations of parents and schools and the demands they make on students. Dr. Gardner suggested that "we've been expecting less (of students), so they've been giving us less."[55]

California's state school superintendent, Bill Honig, has suggested a strengthening of requirements for graduates of the state's public schools. Peirce points out that to certain writers, Honig's effectiveness in implementing such a strengthening,

> is questionable in a system whose basic control is still vested in local boards and which is so heavily affected by legislative mandates, the power of teacher unions, and declining revenues.[56]

One experience of my high school career has stuck in my mind firmly for these many years. At the beginning of the year, the geometry teacher announced that one of the requirements for passing the course would be that each and every student would stand at the blackboard and orally prove the theorem of Pythagores. The class was not a homogeneous group of high-ability students, and the requirement appeared unattainable for some class members. Some students accomplished the task quickly and easily. Not so for others, but regardless of the difficulty and discomfort, every member of the class did complete the task by the end of the year.

My recommendation is that boards of education establish respectable standards of performance and demand that students reach for these standards. The standards should be determined only after thorough study involving all of the concerned segments of the school community. The experienced of other schools that have implemented such programs should be used. The legal principles that have emerged should be followed. And most of all, school boards should stand behind superintendents, principals, and teachers as they implement the policy.

The bottom line decision of what to do with those who do not meet the standards is one that has to be determined by each state or by each school district. This decision will reflect the hopes, the aspirations, and the expectations of parents and citizens of the various localities. If there is a lesson to be learned from where we've been in public education, as well as where we are now, to me, it is: if we expect less from students--we get less. BUT, if we expect more--we will get more.

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